

**The Impact That Talent/Audience Interactions Have on the Reality Television  
Landscape**

An Analysis of Season Two of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*

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## Abstract

**The Impact That Talent/Audience Interactions Have on the Reality Television Landscape**

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Rebecca Leah Henshell

This thesis investigates the relationship between the television viewer and on-air characters within reality television. More specifically, this study analyzes the communication between viewers and on-air characters via social networking platforms, and suggests this connection is a true catalyst for increased show ratings. The formal problem statement is the following: Is there a direct connection between increased viewership (measured by ratings) for the television program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2) and the evolution of the talent/audience relationship via social networking sites that has contributed to the overall successes of the program? Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches the study found an association between increased web traffic on premiere show episodes in comparison with Nielsen Media Research, and showed that social networking does in fact impact television ratings and the overall user experience. Also, by viewing actual posts between the viewer and characters, one can understand the growing popularity of reality television stars and how this affects their personal businesses, outside the realm of their

television persona. Above all, this study examines the multi-screen platform phenomena that will change the way the world watches television and communicates with each other.





## Chapter 1: Introduction

Merriam-Webster defines reality television as “television programming that features videos of actual occurrences (as police chase, stunt or natural disaster)” (Merriam-Webster, 2010). The meaning of this specific genre has certainly evolved throughout the years since its inception. Many believe this type of programming began with the show *Candid Camera* in 1948. Produced by Allen Funt, the program featured hidden cameras filming ordinary people being confronted with unusual situations (Slocum, 2010). This particular show set the foundation for reality TV, by emphasizing the use of “average” people with no prior acting experience. Though today, there are many programs featuring celebrities in reality shows, it is the concept of watching someone in their natural habitat that continues to fascinate and influence a growing audience (Slocum, 2010).

Within the past twenty years, reality TV has featured a variety of settings and characters. In MTV’s *The Real World*, viewers met a cast of characters picked to live and work together in close proximity. These people came from varying backgrounds, which influenced great drama and subsequently created a vivid storyline. This “fish out of water” experiment continued to evolve throughout reality television, such as sport competitions like *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*

and other competitive programs like *America's Next Top Model* and *The Apprentice* (Rose, 2011). Today, the trend focuses more on extreme demographics, the very rich, the very Italian, or the very gay, as examples. Shows like *Jersey Shore* and *The Real Housewives* franchise examines a particular population and above all, delves deep into the eccentric and intense characters that make up this subgroup.

Jonathan Murray, co-creator of *The Real World* series, has stated, "It's about finding these micro worlds and exposing them to the larger culture. Whether we're sitting in an airport or a bookstore, we all love to watch people" (Rose, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the focus was on season 2 of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, and the characters and conflicts that arise among them. It is these conflicts that drive the story and allow us to question why as an audience we become so engaged and enthralled by other people's lives to the point where we modify our internet habits to follow these characters and respond in large numbers.

## **Problem**

Is there a direct connection between increased viewership (measured by ratings) for the television program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2) and the evolution of the talent/audience relationship via social networking sites that has contributed to the overall successes of the program?

## **Literature Review**

As new technology develops, it is the assumption that older models and practices will eventually fall by the wayside (Slocum, 2010). Many believed at one time that the Internet would kill-off other forms of communication, including television. In recent studies, that appears not to be the case, and within the last few years the Internet has actually contributed to the revival of television ratings (Stelter, 2010). Many television executives believe that the Internet complements television watching through the means of social media, and enables water-cooler conversation. Leslie Moonves, chief executive of the CBS Corporation has stated, "The Internet is our friend, not our enemy" (Stelter, 2010).

For example, in 2010, NBC aired the *Golden Globes* live on both coasts for the first time. The reason for this change was to encourage viewers to watch and chat online simultaneously. This not only allows the viewer to feel more

connected to what they are watching, but as Chloe Sladden, Director of Media Partnerships for Twitter has said, "...the audience becomes part of the story itself" (Stelter, 2010). The use of social media in conjunction with television watching is driving ratings and shows the importance of interconnectivity to the overall television experience (Stelter, 2010).

This user experience proves to be even more prevalent in live events such as award shows and sporting events. According to a Nielsen ratings study and Pat McDonough, Senior Vice President for Insights and Analysis at Nielsen, "Watching live events, such as an award show or sporting event, allows the viewer to feel closer to the action and generates a greater appeal to watch. Moreover, simultaneously using Twitter and other social media to follow the event helps enhance the experience even more" (Nielsenwire, 2011).

The following two graphs show how the *Golden Globes* and the *Grammy Awards* have seen a steady increase in viewership over the past three years:

### *Golden Globes*

Year	Total Number of Viewers
2011	17,003,000
2010	16,882,000
2009	14,860,000
2008^	6,038,000
2007	20,036,000
2006	18,765,000

^ *Golden Globes Press Conference* only due to Writers Guild of America West strike.

Source: The Nielsen Company

### *Grammy Awards*

Year	Total Number of Viewers
2011	26,667,000
2010	25,869,000
2009	19,048,000
2008	17,182,000
2007	20,058,000
2006	17,005,000

Source: The Nielsen Company

Not only does it seem that what we watch affects how we interact through social media, but it could also give greater detail about how we communicate with each other by what discussions are made, and what actions are taken, from the subject matter at hand, as stated by the Cable & Telecommunications Association for Marketing on March 6, 2011 (CTAM). In relation to television, it could give greater insight as to why we watch what we watch. According to a study by the CTAM, 79 percent of regular social networkers say they would be likely to watch a television show based on a recommendation from a friend via a social network site. Thirty-three percent of regular social networkers reported that they were made aware of a new television show because of something they saw on a social networking site (PRWeb, 2010). This study also found more than one-half of adults who visited social networking sites in the past month visited them every day. Char Beales, president and CEO of the CTAM has stated, "These findings underscore the potential 'water cooler' effect social networking sites can have, as well as the opportunities for television programmers and advertisers to interact with viewers in an even more meaningful way" (PRWeb, 2010).

It has now become part of the television industry's business model to capitalize on this fairly new form of communication and use it in a way that not only boosts ratings, but keeps the viewer engaged beyond the television. TV

executives are looking to exploit this “two-screen” behavior so that viewers keep watching, come back, and keep talking about the show/event at hand.

This online water-cooler effect “...makes big shows even bigger... and gives small shows a new way to stand out” (Stelter, 2011). It can even bring attention to older programming by giving it a facelift through social networking. For example, on the same day of the 2011 Grammy’s, Howard Stern’s film “Private Parts” was airing on HBO2. Stern decided to live-tweet during this re-air and suddenly viewers were switching to watch this 1997 comedy because of Stern himself. Actions such as this make watching a program more engaging and a social activity (Stelter, 2011). This business model also reshapes when people are watching, as some viewers want to chat about what is current, thus blurring the notion that digital video recording devices are influencing our watching habits.

Viewer feedback through tweeting and Facebook status updates is also influencing how television programmers select their lineups. For example, Netherlands 3, a Dutch public broadcaster streams pilots for new shows and asks viewers to vote and share their thoughts on the programming at hand. The station then picks which shows to air based on the viewer feedback. This is a

revolutionary concept and could have very interesting results if adopted more widely (Hsia, 2010).

One might ask who specifically is using social media. And can all tactics for connecting to online users be done in the same way? Moreover, are networks using the right platforms to “speak” to their desired demographic? According to Advertising Age, Facebook has approximately 155 million users in the US alone. The majority of these users are between the ages of 18-24. Programmers who want to reach a younger demographic would seek Facebook to place ads and connect to their audience. Those looking to seek an older demographic might try to use LinkedIn, a social networking site geared towards 25-54. Recent estimates note that only 10% of the US population actively uses Twitter. Though this platform is not as widely adopted, it is another way to reach the 18-29 demographic, which is 41.5% of Twitter users (Boris, 2011).

An example of a network utilizing social media to connect to their specific demographic is that of MTV. In preparation for the 2011 *MTV Movie Awards*, the network will be utilizing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. MTV plans to use all platforms before, during and after the program airs live. MTV realizes that their viewers use multiple social networks to connect with each other, and they are determined to be on all of them (Lawler, 2011). Kristin Frank, GM of



MTV has stated, “We want to be wherever the audience is, and we know audience is in a lot of different places – and a lot of times it’s in many different places at the same time” (Lawler, 2011). At the end of the day, the network’s main goal is to drive tune-in to the live airing of the award show. By enticing viewers with postings across various social networks, MTV hopes to get viewers to tune in and catch moments during the Movie Awards that they might have missed otherwise.

Others are still skeptical of the notion that social media are a true influence on improved ratings. Though buzz is created through fostered communication, it could be that this means of communication is also valuable in non-quantifiable ways. According to Christy Tanner, General Manager of TV Guide, “People tend to see social media as a conduit for letting television networks know the shows they like. But social network buzz around a show thus far seems to have little bearing on the show’s Nielsen ratings for television” (Jackson, 2010). Listening to social media chatter can also prove to be harmful for some networks. For example CBS brought back the program *Jericho* after it had been canceled due to a public outcry via social networking sites. In this case, the program did not perform well on its second outing (Jackson, 2010).

Tanner's point of view is a bit contradictory as she also stated, "We have all kinds of data points on popularity now that are divergent from what Nielsen would say the top shows are in America" (Jackson, 2010). Thus, suggesting that ratings alone cannot determine how certain people feel towards a specific program and what ultimately contributes to popularity. TVGuide.com has many programs that are noted as very popular by those that vote via their site, but they do not rate well. This new set of data could rival that of traditional ratings practices. Tanner also stated, "There is no possible way that Nielsen ratings are truly capturing what people are watching on television. The measurement systems we have in place are seriously inadequate" (Jackson, 2010).

This begs the question, "What is the future of television in social media?" Anthony Rose, Online controller of the BBC, believes the television viewers are becoming the "tastemakers" (Olson, 2010). Out the door goes television reviews in local newspapers or relying on the TV scheduler; people are going to depend on each other more for inside tips on the hottest shows through social networking. But it will also be the responsibility of the networks to have a social media strategy for all programming. All shows will need to have a social media presence so a community, and subsequently conversation, can be cultivated.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

Based on the literature review, it is not sufficient to look at Nielsen Media Research alone to define the successfulness of a television program. With the ever-expanding use of the Internet through social media outlets, many people are making a connection with a particular program through varying channels, such as Twitter, Facebook and online television viewing websites such as Hulu. Networks are influencing their viewers to make this connection by mentioning their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts on-air. On-air talent will often tell viewers that they can find more information regarding the subject at hand on their Facebook pages, and to follow the talent themselves via individual Twitter accounts. Networks are making it known that they want their viewers to use a two-screen approach, while they watch their favorite television show. Thus meaning, networks want their viewers to watch TV and comment online via a computer or mobile device. Television ratings are a useful tool when looking at day to day viewing habits because they provide concrete numbers for how many people are tuning in. But when it comes to a program's ability to sustain an audience beyond the tube, it is important to look at all channels, including other modes of communication on the Internet, so a true successfulness can be determined (Stelter, 2010).

To understand if social network communication between viewers and characters within the program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2) is contributing to increased ratings and the overall success of the series, I used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitatively, the study analyzed Nielsen ratings data by comparing seasons 1 and 2 of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*. I analyzed when ratings have peaked and how the program as a whole has fared year to year. Qualitatively, the study compared the higher rating premiere dates with the interaction and conversations between the characters and viewers on the Internet. By viewing Facebook posts and blog entries from one of the characters, Carolyn Manzo, the study was able to assess why a possible episode might have rated higher due to the content of that airing, and most importantly, because of the rabid communication between viewers both watching a following online. The research analyzed, quantitatively, how many streams of conversation were created in comparison to the ratings of a particular episode. It used an interpretive content analysis methodology when analyzing Facebook posts to decipher the conversations between the viewer and characters, and to see if this influenced a pickup in conversation. The researcher wanted to see if the conversations themselves had any influence on what was being discussed, outside of the general discussion about the show.

Finally, this study delved deeper into the viewer/character relationship, analyzing, through a qualitative approach, why viewers continue to follow these reality stars beyond the television program that has made them famous and into other business ventures that are thriving and pushing these once average individuals into superstardom. It analyzed the business practices of one member of the Real Housewives franchise to further emphasize the power these programs have to turn average people into notable celebrities.

This study addressed the following three research questions:

**RQ 1: Is it possible to determine the success of a program by analyzing online communication between viewers and characters for the program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2)? Success is defined as a series having high enough ratings for the network to continue airing the program.**

**RQ 2: Is online communication, via social networking platforms and blog postings on the Bravo Network website, a contributing factor to increased ratings for the program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2)?**

**RQ 3: How has the communication and relationships between viewers and characters developed and contributed to outside business ventures for the characters of the program?**

### **Limitations of Study**

This study does not provide insight into web traffic data, because that information was not available to the researcher nor was any detailed ratings information. Owners of websites are able to find out how many unique visitors or page views they have received in one day, but that information is not made available to the general public. Though it would have been beneficial to this study to compare page views for a specific day in comparison to a premiere date for the program, the researcher was still able to see how many comments people made and make the assumption, based on sheer communication through discussion posts, how active a particular day was.

Also, this study does not provide insight into social networking in combination with all reality television programming that is currently on-air and in the past. Though this research suggests that using social networking as a means for marketing and promoting a particular program has grown dramatically the past few years, it is not a widespread tactic that is adopted by all television networks (Jackson, 2010). The implementation of using social media in conjunction with television is still a relatively new means of communication. This study focuses on one particular program, and that can be used as a case study and translated and adopted to various other reality programs.

### Chapter 3: The Study

*The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, airing on the Bravo Network, is a reality docu-series that follows well-to-do women in a small community of New Jersey. It exposes their relationships with each other and family members. All of the characters within the program know each other. They are either family members or friends from the past. The result is a sense of drama and a storyline that includes many confrontations and high-pressure moments. Above all, the program embraces and exposes the brash personalities of each woman, further emphasizing their stereotypical New Jersey personas (loud, opinioned and flashy-dressed). As stated previously, it has become increasingly popular for networks to create storylines showcasing people with extreme demographics. The “very rich” is an example of an extreme demographic. This program does just that, in a way that is enticing, compelling yet comedic. The program is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> season and is a prime example of regular people exposing their lives and an audience that can’t seem to get enough of it.

The researcher chose to study this program because of its ratings success and because it uses a great deal of social networking as a marketing tactic.

The first season of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* fared well among television watchers, as approximately 2 million viewers on average were tuning

in weekly for premiere episode, which aired at 10 pm eastern time. The season was short, only 6 premiere episodes and aired between May and June of 2009. Summer programming tends to rate lower as people are traveling and enjoying outdoor activities, but this series broke the mold with its impressive ratings that continued to grow week to week, even during the summer months.

Week 1 of season 1 earned a 1.65 household rating with 1.7 million people watching. As ratings grew steadily week to week, the finale episode rated a 3.15 with over 3 million watchers; a 76 percent increase from episode 1 in comparison with the finale (see Appendix A). The series skewed highly towards women watchers, primarily between the ages of 18 and 49.

There were also an additional 4 episodes to round out the entire season which consisted of a recap show of the finale, two reunion programs and a lost footage episode. One might think that dragging a series out beyond its regularly scheduled episodes would only water down the property, but that is not the case with this franchise, as the ever popular reunion episodes tend to rate higher than some of the premiere, regular season shows. For example, the two reunion episodes earned a 2.57 and 2.18 household ratings, respectively (see Appendix A). As a whole, season one did extremely well for a new series, but it does help that the franchise as a whole began with four other successful series, that started



in 2006. There are currently six series in the franchise focusing on a group of women from Orange County, New York, City, Atlanta, New Jersey, Beverly Hills and Miami. The Washington D.C. series has since been cancelled.

The second season of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* was extended to 16 premiere episodes with two reunion specials. As a whole, season two averaged a 2.22 household rating for the entire season; up nearly 14 percent from season one. Again, week to week ratings steadily grew between May and August of 2010, when the season premiered. Women watchers 18-49 again dominated total viewers with approximately 1.2 million watchers for each premiere episode. It is interesting to point out that male viewers held a strong portion of the viewership with an average of 434,000 watchers on premiere nights between the ages of 18 and 49.

The season finale for season two earned a 2.85 household ratings with nearly 3.4 million people watching. For the Bravo Network, this was their highest rated Monday telecast ever and the highest rated telecast of the year among total viewers for 2010 (Seidman, 2010). It should also be noted that the content within this specific episode revolved around a feud between two of the characters on the program that had been developing since season one, and

certainly contributed to the overwhelming number of viewers waiting to see how it all played out.

The Nielsen television ratings system is the primary source of audience measurement information around the world. These ratings are gathered by digital people meters. This method is based on a multi-staged probability sample. The multi-staged probability sample is a major criticism of the measuring system; it's still just a sample rather than a universe measurement and is subject to sampling errors. A very small fraction of the population is selected and only those that agree to have the meters installed in their homes are used as the sample size. There are only 25,000 total American households that participate in the Nielsen daily metered system, compared to the nearly 115 million U.S. television households. As a result, the total number of Nielsen homes only amounts to 0.02183% of the total American television household (TVB.org, 2010).

An article from Cornell University's Daily Sun compares Nielsen's gathering methods to that of the 2000 election "hanging chads" fiasco. The article firmly states that the Nielsen system reflects a method that, "public opinion is not so inclusive in its tabulations, ignoring large segments of the population in favor of simplicity" (Segal, 2007). Overall, the Nielsen system is outdated, but it is the only complete system available.

Another major criticism of Nielsen is the company's failure to monitor and rate Internet television viewing. Sites like Hulu and YouTube and other network owned sites that air full-length episodes have the ability to track page views on the Internet and correspond that to how many people are "tuning in" online, but this information fails to provide any insight into demographics so networks can both track and expand their market research offerings. This information will become increasingly important as more people use other methods, besides that of the television, to obtain programming entertainment. Combined with social networking conversations about programming, there is a lot of information that is diffused throughout the Internet that is not reflected in Nielsen's research that could really affect what we are watching and if its success is being determined properly.

Specific information regarding online page views (such as individual page growth and site analytics) is only made available to the network executives of a particular channel. Often, public relation departments of varying networks will publicize this information when the news is good. Regarding the finale of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2), the results were newsworthy.

BravoTV.com, which houses *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* show site, saw triple-digit week-over-week gains the day of the finale episode. When comparing the premiere date on August 16, 2010 and the finale episode on August 23, 2010,

the finale episode saw a 149 percent increase in page views, 630 percent increase in video streams, and a 100 percent increase in unique visitors (Seidman, 2010). These results suggest that the online presence for this show is necessary and could potentially contribute to the increase in ratings week to week.

According to the Bravo Network, season 2 of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* as a whole posted 119 million page views, an average of 76.5K daily unique visitors, and nearly 6.2 million video streams. It helps to have a popular program so a network's page views are high, but Bravo does a particularly thorough job in filling their show pages with content that not only is plentiful, but useful to the end user. The season 2 show page consists of bios of the characters, episode descriptions, blogs, games, photo galleries, message boards, and most importantly, full episodes. Not only is Bravo hoping you watch on your TV set, but they are encouraging you to watch via your computer, even though they do not see any "traditional" ratings from this method.

The true testament as to how successful the show websites actually are comes from the discussion boards and comments on blog postings: this is where the viewers are making their voices heard. The discussion board section for season two is broken down by individual episode discussions, and 1 general discussion group. For the purposes of this study, the researcher compared each

episode (there were 17 total episodes in season 2), the total viewers for each episode (made available by Nielsen ratings), total comment replies on message boards (these numbers were made available on the Bravo site) in combination with the household ratings for each episode, derived from Nielsen ratings.

The following chart is a breakdown of the message board analytics for season 2 of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* on Bravotv.com, highlighting total views and total replies. Household Ratings derived from Nielsen ratings reports was included:

**Table 1: Message Board Analytics**

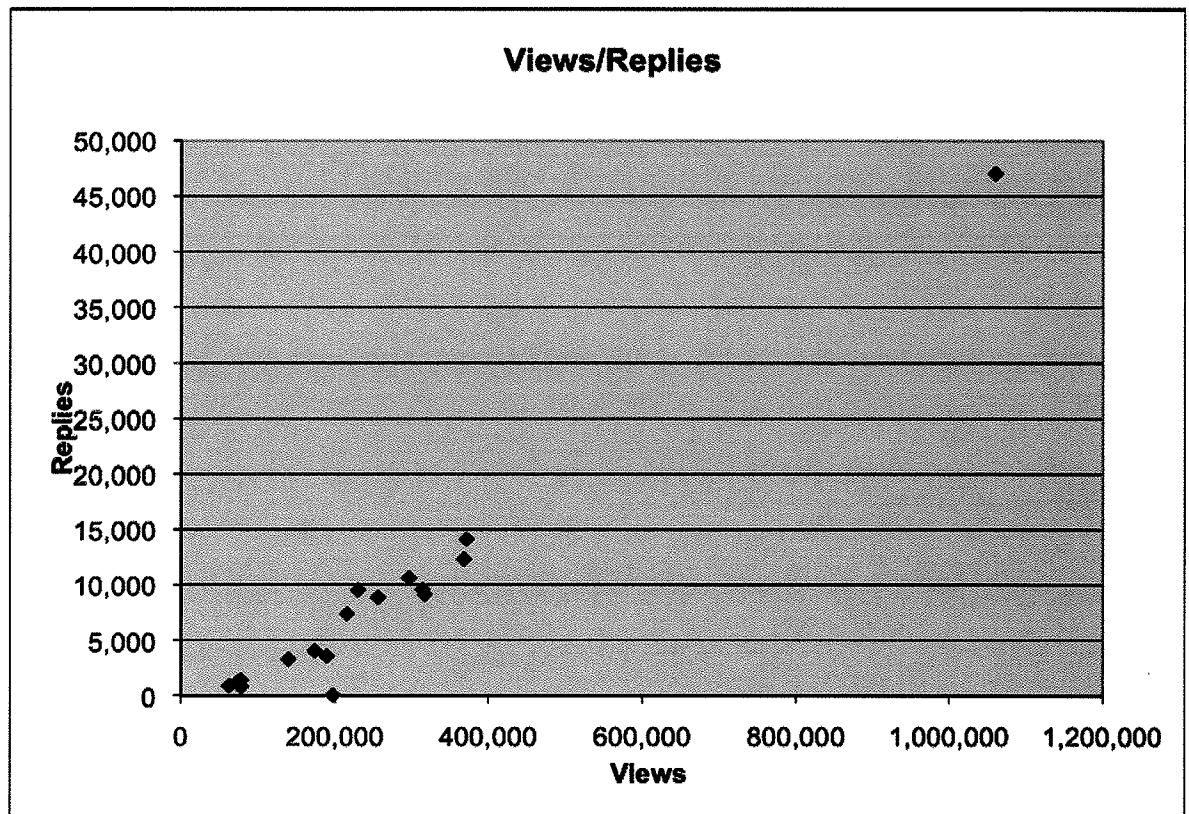
Episode Number	Total Views	Total Replies	Household Ratings
1	78,124	772	1.99
2	74,696	1,259	1.73
3	77,690	1,351	1.74
4	62,465	847	1.87
5	189,182	3,543	1.97
6	196,972	4,349	2.14
7	139,307	3,253	2.39
8	173,546	4,017	2.28
9	316,880	9,137	2.34
10	314,152	9,558	2.69
11	296,358	10,620	2.34
12	215,358	7,381	2.19
13	256,073	8,863	2.33
14	371,693	14,148	2.54
15	229,818	9,526	2.22
16	368,217	12,335	2.85
17	1,060,642	47,022	3.18

*\*Highlighted in yellow are the top three rated premiere episodes*

*Sources: Nielsen Ratings, Bravo Network*

While looking at message board views and replies for season 2, it is evident that there is an association between number of replies and views on the message board with the rating the premiere program received. Looking at the top 3 rated premiere episodes (14, 16, and 17) one can see that the total replies and total views were at their highest during these weeks as well. The higher rated and viewed programs also had the highest replies online. With that, a connection can be made that the higher rated the program, the higher the message board views and replies. The following chart further emphasizes the association between discussion board replies and total views. Looking at discussion board replies and total views, the correlation coefficient is .9848, meaning 98.48% of the change in one variable (total views) can be attributed to the change in the other variable (replies). The data suggests that discussion board replies for each premiere episode of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2) had a positive effect on both total viewers and the overall rating.

Table 2: Views vs. Replies



Bravotv.com's blog presence for season two of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* was also dynamic, in the sense that all characters from the program were participating in separate blogs, helping to give a defined point of view and voice for each member of the show, away from their on camera persona. Season 2 had a total of six blogs, one for each a member of the cast. It is not clear if the cast was required to post weekly, but the posts suggest a great deal of consistency week to week, as do the viewer posts. In addition to the five cast member blogs, there is a guest blog from a housewife from the New York City series, and a blog from one



of the New Jersey housewives' daughter. As the television show creates a storyline, as do the blogs – highlighting key events from the series and providing personal opinions. This allows the viewer not only learn more about the show, but to feel a deeper connection with the characters, and thus feel the need to respond in a conversational style, like a friend would.

For the purposes of this study, The researcher compared each episode (there were 17 total episodes in season 2), the total comments made by online users for one of the blogs (these numbers were made available on the Bravo site) in combination with the household ratings for each episode, derived from Nielsen ratings.

The following chart outlines one character on the program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2), her weekly blog post and corresponding number of comments, along with the premiere episode household rating:

**Table 3: Blog Posting Analytics**

Episode Number	Total Comments	Household Ratings
1	416	1.99
2	289	1.73
3	343	1.74
4	390	1.87
5	1,108	1.97
6	436	2.14
7	559	2.39
8	1,621	2.28
9	780	2.34
10	820	2.69
11	640	2.34
12	342	2.19
13	223	2.33
14	556	2.54
15	1,810	2.22
16	1,383	2.85
17	1,680	3.18

*\*Highlighted in yellow are the top three weeks with the highest number of blog comment*

*Source: Nielsen Ratings, Bravo Network*

The researcher chose to look at the analytics of one particular blog writer, Caroline Manzo, a character from the program. The researcher selected Caroline because she is known as the matriarch of the show and has a strong fan base with more than 300,000 followers on Facebook and Twitter combined. Again, the information reveals that the higher rated programs also receive the most discussion and comments on blog postings. The finale episode, 17, the highest rated program of the regular season earned a 3.18 household rating. Caroline's corresponding blog post garnered nearly 1,700 responses, which is four times the amount of her original post for the season. Though there is some definite fluctuation between week to week regarding blog post comments, as measured by number of comments posted by viewers, it is evident that the higher rated premiere weeks did receive a greater amount of comments compared with the lower rated weeks. The correlation between total comments and the household ratings was .535. Though this isn't an extremely high correlation, it is still positive and further explains a relationship between comment posts and ratings in relation to this program.

The final portion of the study looked at the social networking aspect of the talent/audience interactions by analyzing Facebook posts. The researcher again looked at the character of Caroline Manzo and followed her postings, along with the corresponding responses from viewers for the reunion episode, show 17,

which aired August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Since this was the highest rated program of the season, it proved to be a good opportunity to see what the talent is actually saying and how viewers are responding.

Appendix B represents a thread of posts from the character Caroline Manzo. As episode 17 was premiering on Bravo, Caroline was posting status updates as the episode was airing. Throughout the two-hour telecast, Caroline posted a total of twenty-two times. The topic of the posts ranged from what was being discussed in the program and how she felt about the other people on the cast. Above all, her opinions were her own, straight forward and without filter.

This openness in her writing seemed to strike a chord with fans as they came out in droves to “like” what she was saying and make their own opinions and comments. Over 10,000 people posted that they liked one of Caroline’s post during this time period. Over 6,000 people made a comment on one of Caroline’s comments. Even though the total number of people communicating directly with Caroline during this episode might seem like a small number – it is still an impressive feat to have people following and commenting a single person for a span of two hours. Most of the responses from viewers are that of compassion and encouragement. These are diehard fans that stick up for their favorite television talent and want them to know it. Though these individual posts might

not contribute to the ratings themselves, they are creating an outlet for those that watch, to make their opinions known and allow for a new form of communication between audience and talent.

Finally, how are these characters benefiting from their newfound fame on a reality television program? Many of them are achieving great success outside of the television show that has made them famous. Whether it is a charity or personal business, by exposing it on a national platform – people start to notice, and what to know more about it. For this particular program, each character has a fan page on Facebook, individual websites outside that of the Bravo site and they all promote businesses or charities within the program and on talk shows during their promotional tours. Their faces are seen all over the country, thus emphasizing their popularity and staying power.

One of the most successful housewives is former New York City housewife member, Bethanny Frankel. Her name is synonymous with healthy eating and lifestyle, and she couldn't do it without the housewives series as a platform. Known as the brash, never marrying, business-minded type, Bethanny grew a fan base and business beyond her "work" on the Bravo TV show. Often speaking about and showing her margarita mixes on the TV show, she also ventured into health books and DVDs. She also obtained two spin-offs both on

Bravo, *Bethanny Getting Married* and *Bethanny Ever After*. Moreover, she has appeared on *Skating with the Stars* and can often be seen on a variety of talk shows and morning news programs. She uses social networking by posting daily on Facebook and Twitter, bringing her fans into her daily life, and to promote her brands. By promoting her outside ventures during the program and through these online venues, Bethanny has been able to gain exposure that advertisers would have to spend a great deal of money on.

Though not all of the Housewives have seen the same successes as Bethanny, it's an example that by using a national television platform, one can achieve a large enough fan base to sustain their celebrity status beyond the reality television program that has made them famous, and ultimately, create a business and brands, out of it.

## Chapter 4: Summary of Findings

A great deal can be learned from this study, especially in relation to cable and broadcast channels' tactics for using social networking in a new age of technology. It is becoming increasingly important for television executives to use a multi-screen platform approach for reaching their audience. The research shows that an association can be made between show ratings for a particular program and social networking. A positive association was found showing an increase in ratings and viewers also resulted in an increase in online activity with blog postings and comments within message boards.

Looking at the research questions at the center of this study, the following conclusions are offered:

**RQ 1: Is it possible to determine the success of a program by analyzing online communication between viewers and characters for the program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2)?**

It is possible to determine the successfulness of a program by analyzing web traffic, such as views and comments. When comparing this data week to week and comparing those overall numbers with household ratings, one can see that a web presence is important and noteworthy, especially for this specific program. This program used its web presence to the fullest by implementing live

messaging during premiere episodes, which drew a crowd and grew as premiere episodes grew ratings wise.

**RQ 2: Is online communication a contributing factor to increased ratings for the program *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2)?**

Yes, online communication was a contributing factor to increased ratings according to the research conducted. Week to week, traffic increased online at Bravotv.com, as did the ratings of the television program. This is a strong association that cannot be discounted.

**RQ 3: How has the communication and relationships between viewers and characters developed and contributed to outside business ventures for the characters of the program?**

This research shows that strong bonds can be made between talent and the viewer, both online and through their personal business ventures. Throughout the television season, the audience becomes close with those that they are watching, and this communication continues beyond the final episode of the series. This is evident by the increase in comments in message boards week to week. As a result, the talent's personal business ventures become of an interest to



their fans, and the fans will support in droves. The reality program is merely a catalyst for these future longstanding celebrities.

### Conclusion

This study shows that with the increase in popularity of social networking and online communication, it has become imperative for television shows to connect with their audience on-air and online. By comparing online usage and ratings the research found that a single program could very well credit some of their viewers due to online activity. For the program studied, *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (season 2), many of the higher rated programs also had heavy online traffic within the same evening. This suggests that a reality TV show's social media presence can affect its ratings, and that a social media presence should be part of every TV show's marketing mix if producers are looking to connect with their audience beyond the television appointment viewing experience.

The future of television will use multi-platforms as the audience changes their viewing habits. Negatively, it was difficult to accurately obtain online analytics. Hopefully in the future, those that look at online traffic in comparison with ratings will have better access to information that will aid in more concise and systematic answers.

Those that study the connection between audience and talent will find that though we might all come from different places with varying backgrounds, it is interesting to find that we all have the same worries, opinions and dreams. It will be interesting to see how these emotions are conveyed in the future via online platforms and if people are still interested in knowing everything about everyone. Will this ever get “old” and how will television executives keep this communication fresh? Only the future holds these answers.

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Appendix A: Season 1 and 2 Ratings for The Real Housewives of New Jersey

Live + Same Day

TOTAL-04/27/2009																														HHLD	P2+	HHLD	M18-34	M18-49	M25-54	M55+	F18-34	F18-49	F25-54	F55+	P2+	M18-34	M18-49	M25-54	M55+	F18-34	F18-49	F25-54	F55+									
ORIGINATORS																														Rtg	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Proj (000)	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg	Rtg									
PROGRAMS			RPT DATE	DAY(S)	S TIME	E TIME	T DUR	# TC	IND	EPISODE TITLE																																																
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/12/2009	.T.....	11:00 PM	12:00 AM	60	1	O	101 THICKER THAN WATER	1.85	1,715	1,499	137	245	268	48	612	1,015	855	198	0.73	0.52	0.47	0.55	0.18	2.33	1.90	1.67	0.63																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/19/2009	.T.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	102 MAMAS KNOWS BEST	1.37	1,489	1,246	131	247	243	31	473	867	784	137	0.64	0.49	0.47	0.49	0.12	1.80	1.63	1.53	0.43																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/26/2009	.T.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	103 NOT ONE OF US	1.97	2,147	1,791	213	360	337	47	768	1,317	1,142	182	0.92	0.80	0.69	0.69	0.17	2.92	2.47	2.23	0.58																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/02/2009	.T.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	104 BLACK & WHITE & READ ALL OVER	1.86	2,003	1,690	157	260	300	60	710	1,244	1,156	182	0.86	0.59	0.50	0.61	0.22	2.70	2.34	2.26	0.58																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/09/2009	.T.....	10:00 PM	11:02 PM	62	1	O	105 CASINOS AND C-CUPS	1.96	2,154	1,778	157	304	356	37	731	1,279	1,142	214	0.92	0.59	0.58	0.72	0.14	2.78	2.40	2.23	0.68																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/16/2009	...T....	10:00 PM	11:02 PM	62	1	O	106 FINALE	3.15	3,477	2,864	323	537	558	95	1,137	1,918	1,718	393	1.49	1.22	1.03	1.13	0.35	4.33	3.60	3.36	1.25																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/18/2009	...T....	9:00 PM	10:00 PM	60	1	O	107 THE LAST SUPPER	1.58	1,572	1,436	107	210	186	72	509	916	886	215	0.72	0.40	0.40	0.38	0.27	1.94	1.72	1.73	0.69																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/23/2009	.T.....	9:00 PM	10:00 PM	60	1	O	108 REUNION WATCH WHAT HAPPENS PT1	2.57	2,890	2,334	267	498	483	89	879	1,529	1,506	331	1.24	1.01	0.95	0.98	0.33	3.35	2.87	2.94	1.05																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/25/2009	...T....	9:00 PM	10:00 PM	60	1	O	109 REUNION WATCH WHAT HAPPENS PT 2	2.18	2,498	1,976	199	378	363	83	723	1,278	1,264	312	1.07	0.75	0.72	0.74	0.31	2.75	2.40	2.47	0.99																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	07/09/2009	...T....	8:58 PM	10:00 PM	62	1	O	110 THE LOST FOOTAGE	1.03	1,056	933	59	140	137	41	322	538	554	148	0.45	0.22	0.27	0.28	0.15	1.23	1.02	1.08	0.47																													
BRVO-2009																														808	10	O																										
																														1.93	2,111	1,758	175	318	323	80	687	1,191	1,101	231	0.90	0.66	0.61	0.68	0.22	2.81	2.24	2.15	0.74									
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/03/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	201 WATER UNDER THE TABLE	1.98	2,326	1,861	210	379	390	117	723	1,261	1,168	303	0.97	0.77	0.71	0.77	0.41	2.67	2.33	2.24	0.91																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/10/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	202 GENERATION VEXED	1.73	2,003	1,620	208	302	260	100	639	1,086	1,015	239	0.83	0.76	0.57	0.52	0.35	2.36	2.00	1.95	0.72																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/17/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	203 CATTY WALK	1.74	2,032	1,631	175	321	314	69	646	1,119	1,061	209	0.84	0.64	0.60	0.62	0.24	2.38	2.07	2.04	0.63																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/24/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	204 BABIES BUBBLES BUBBIES	1.87	2,162	1,752	207	376	350	63	677	1,272	1,141	227	0.90	0.76	0.71	0.69	0.22	2.50	2.35	2.19	0.68																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	05/31/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	205 INTO THE LIONS DEN	1.97	2,320	1,845	149	351	368	106	739	1,259	1,151	321	0.96	0.54	0.68	0.73	0.38	2.72	2.32	2.21	0.96																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/07/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	206 ITS NOT ME, ITS YOU	2.14	2,436	2,009	187	390	360	112	851	1,382	1,297	274	1.01	0.68	0.73	0.71	0.40	3.14	2.55	2.49	0.82																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/14/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	207 PLAY AT YOUR OWN RISK	2.39	2,746	2,239	252	439	395	109	792	1,456	1,404	314	1.14	0.92	0.82	0.78	0.39	2.92	2.69	2.70	0.94																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/21/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	208 BUBBIES GONE BAD	2.28	2,847	2,139	229	487	468	83	900	1,556	1,377	310	1.18	0.83	0.91	0.93	0.30	3.32	2.87	2.64	0.93																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	06/28/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	209 POSCHIE SPITE	2.34	2,713	2,193	174	374	371	101	854	1,471	1,333	312	1.13	0.63	0.70	0.74	0.36	3.15	2.72	2.56	0.94																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	07/12/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	210 COUNTRY CLUBBED	2.69	3,288	2,521	316	596	534	128	1,008	1,688	1,557	368	1.37	1.15	1.12	1.06	0.45	3.72	3.12	2.99	1.10																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	07/19/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	211 STAUB WOUNDS	2.34	2,744	2,195	223	423	423	116	808	1,394	1,250	366	1.14	0.81	0.79	0.84	0.41	2.98	2.58	2.40	1.10																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	07/26/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	212	2.19	2,596	2,048	254	464	448	89	831	1,406	1,267	299	1.08	0.93	0.87	0.89	0.25	3.10	2.62	2.44	0.89																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	08/02/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:01 PM	61	1	O	213 DONT DRINK THE HOLY WATER	2.33	2,644	2,177	267	482	422	97	772	1,359	1,351	300	1.10	0.97	0.91	0.84	0.34	2.88	2.54	2.61	0.90																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	08/09/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	214 THE CHANELS OF VENICE	2.54	3,083	2,377	303	593	556	89	917	1,576	1,462	328	1.29	1.10	1.12	1.11	0.32	3.42	2.94	2.82	0.98																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	08/16/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	215 HILLS ARE ALIVE W/GUIDICE	2.22	2,585	2,075	225	442	447	74	693	1,330	1,304	327	1.08	0.82	0.83	0.89	0.26	2.59	2.48	2.52	0.98																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	08/23/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:00 PM	60	1	O	216 THE HEADS OF FAMILY WILL ROLL	2.85	3,362	2,671	224	535	581	105	976	1,732	1,638	430	1.40	0.82	1.01	1.16	0.37	3.64	3.23	3.16	1.29																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	08/30/2010	M.....	10:00 PM	11:15 PM	75	1	SO	217 REUNION PART 1	3.18	3,852	2,989	325	670	623	117	1,184	2,006	1,847	531	1.60	1.18	1.26	1.24	0.40	4.41	3.76	3.58	1.55																													
BRVO	REAL HSWIVES OF NJ	09/06/2010	M.....	9:00 PM	10:15 PM	75	1	SO	218 REUNION PART 2	2.63	3,210	2,471	273	575	575	109	886	1,611	1,554	398	1.33	0.99	1.08	1.15	0.38	3.30	3.02	3.01	1.16																													
BRVO																														968	16	O																										
																														2.22	2,816	2,084	225	434	418	96	801	1,396	1,298	308	1.09	0.82	0.82	0.83	0.34	2.97	2.59	2.50	0.92									

## Appendix B: Facebook Status Updates



**Caroline Manzo**

At this point I knew we were in trouble.

August 30, 2010 at 10:03pm · Like · Comment

345 people like this.

View all 303 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

just watched the reunion..... oh brother..... time to write my blog. will you be tweeting/Facebooking with me?

August 30, 2010 at 8:52pm · Like · Comment

726 people like this.

View all 609 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

ARE YOU READY??? Before you watch tonight make sure you check out my new column on [www.glo.com](http://www.glo.com) I'm excited!



**Relationship, Style, Living & Beauty News and Photos on MSN Lifestyle | Glo**  
[www.glo.com](http://www.glo.com)

Lifestyle site for women covering the best in style, beauty, living and relationships.

August 30, 2010 at 7:30pm · Like · Comment · Share

518 people like this.

View all 281 comments



**Poor Andy, he was really trying to calm everyone down.**

August 30, 2010 at 10:18pm · Like · Comment

313 people like this.

View all 294 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

oh God..... I can't..... I was in complete shock..... you have NO IDEA

August 30, 2010 at 10:12pm · Like · Comment

376 people like this.

View all 779 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

I hate this clip.... hate hate hate

August 30, 2010 at 10:09pm · Like · Comment

169 people like this.

View all 309 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

Lauren did Jac's makeup, mine too!!!! she did a good job, right???

August 30, 2010 at 10:04pm · Like · Comment

1,025 people like this.

View all 336 comments



**Caroline Manzo**

Look at my baby, he's so handsome!!!

August 30, 2010 at 10:25pm · Like · Comment

500 people like this.

View all 143 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

I'm sure there are millions of Caroline's all over the place. I just happen to be on TV..... but thanks for voting 4 me! xoxo

August 30, 2010 at 10:22pm · Like · Comment

917 people like this.

View all 265 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

Jac is telling the truth

August 30, 2010 at 10:20pm · Like · Comment

340 people like this.

View all 216 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

I meant what I said to Teresa.....

August 30, 2010 at 10:19pm · Like · Comment

311 people like this.



**Caroline Manzo**

Jacs telling the truth here too

August 30, 2010 at 10:33pm · Like · Comment

345 people like this.

View all 303 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

okay, I need to explain this..... it will be in my blog..don't have a stroke!

August 30, 2010 at 10:30pm · Like · Comment

180 people like this.

View all 144 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**

I'm proud of my Albie.....

August 30, 2010 at 10:28pm · Like · Comment

851 people like this.

View all 248 comments

Write a comment...



**Caroline Manzo**


Those gorgeous faces.... they make me smile :o)

August 30, 2010 at 10:26pm · Like · Comment

389 people like this.

View all 122 comments


## Appendix B: Facebook Status Updates (continued)

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 liar liar pants on fire....  
 August 30, 2010 at 10:53pm · Like · Comment

👍 1,014 people like this.

💬 View all 369 comments


Write a comment...

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 we were together.. Swear, I would have never let him drive drunk...  
 August 30, 2010 at 10:45pm · Like · Comment

👍 593 people like this.

💬 View all 340 comments


Write a comment...

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 Albie, you have WiFi on the plane???

👍 139 people like this.

💬 View all 111 comments


Write a comment...

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 Have to finish my blog, look for it tomorrow on Bravotv.com.  
 August 30, 2010 at 11:16pm · Like · Comment

👍 540 people like this.

💬 View all 402 comments


Write a comment...

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 that was nasty Caroline..... give me pass  
 August 30, 2010 at 11:07pm · Like · Comment

👍 582 people like this.

💬 View all 641 comments


Write a comment...

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 I felt like Judge Judy.....  
 August 30, 2010 at 11:02pm · Like · Comment

👍 699 people like this.

💬 View all 558 comments

Write a comment...

 **Caroline Manzo**  
 aaand she says to the down....  
 August 30, 2010 at 10:55pm · Like · Comment

👍 552 people like this.

💬 View all 366 comments

